

PREPARED REMARKS FOR U.S. SECRETARY OF ENERGY BILL RICHARDSON

CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN CAUCUS FORUM OCTOBER 5, 1999

When allegations of espionage at my Department's nuclear labs raised concerns and allegations of racism from the Asian Pacific American community, I took immediate action, forming a working group called the Task Force Against Racial Profiling. It is made up of 19 senior federal and contractor employees from throughout the country - including U.S. Human Rights Commissioner Yvonne Lee, and the heads of all our labs -- and it is tasked with rooting out any activities that offer the slightest hint of prejudice.

These wheels were set in motion four months ago, in June, when I sent a fact-finding delegation to begin this work. Now, after extensive one-on-one, group, and forum meetings at our three nuclear weapons laboratories -- Los Alamos, Sandia, and Lawrence Livermore -- and far-reaching talks with the directors of those labs, the Task Force has just recently submitted their results to me.

Let me summarize what was found.

Led by Deputy Secretary T.J. Glauthier, the Task Force discovered that:

- * Media exploitation of a former-employee fired for security transgressions had led to a sense of distrust and suspicion among Asian Pacific American employees at the Department's nuclear weapons laboratories.
- * Some middle managers and lower level supervisors were unclear about my vehement opposition to any and all racial profiling anywhere in our agency. This made some of our Asian Pacific American employees anxious, puzzling over the specifics of the Department's policies.

I'm worried about these findings. Espionage allegations have cast a pall over the invaluable partnership between the Department of Energy and Asian Pacific Americans, endangering a friendship born of dedication, hard work,

and respect.

Americans of Asian descent have been central to our nation's scientific excellence and national security. Nobel Prize-winners. Industry pioneers. And statesmen like all of you - who have steered funding to the right places where America is making these breakthroughs.

The suggestion that racism exists in our labs endangers this national success. It can breed "brain drain" where we lose the best scientists. And "brain drain" can have a domino-effect, hobbling our research quality, hampering our weapons capability, and, ultimately, endangering our national security.

We can't let that happen. On my watch, we won't let that happen. These findings give us our best tool yet to make sure that racial profiling finds no place in the Department of Energy. Since the Task Force reported to me, I've:

- * demanded my lab directors enforce our no-tolerance policy on prejudice more strongly;
- * I'm asking that specific offenders to our policies be identified and dealt with;
- * we're adding expanded personal sensitivity training;
- * we're increasing focus group meetings, to address the specific concerns of our Asian Pacific American employees;
- * we're developing a pro-active recruiting effort for qualified and essential foreign nationals - which will help ensure diversity and enduring excellence;
- * we're promoting a more diverse workplace: we have a new Interim Director at our Argonne National Lab -- Dr. Yoon I. Chang, who is Korean-American; and
- * I've asked the Task Force to develop additional recommendations as they continue their work. I expect them to report back to me again in November.

Since the spring, I've met numerous times with leaders in the Asian Pacific American community to hear their concerns. I've met with Asian Pacific American employees at all of the Department's weapons laboratories to hear their problems directly. I've been clear: if anyone feels they are a victim of

racial profiling, I want to know.

And I just recently held a meeting of the top Asian Pacific American civil rights groups. I've invited them to take part in additional visits to our labs this month, where they can observe what we've done -- and what we're doing -- to quash any hint of bias. I'm glad to say that they've taken me up on the offer. We agree that the Department has a lot more work to do and with their help we can get it done.

When discussing the recent espionage case in these meetings, I've frequently stated that the alleged actions of any individual should not, do not, and will not reflect on any other American citizen.

I've also addressed concerns that this employee was singled-out for tough treatment, making clear that we took action because the employee committed serious breaches of Department security rules. As the federal official responsible for the secrets harbored in our nuclear labs, I can't abide any such breaches. Now, the FBI is assessing whether legal action should be taken, separate and apart from any actions we may have taken.

But still, we need to do more -- at the Department of Energy, in the corridors of Congress, and across our entire government. To rephrase Abraham Lincoln, the American people do well when America does well by them. That's timeless wisdom.

Lincoln faced an ugly chapter in America's history and staked his career -- and his life -- on its abolition. That's the equity that our nation must have with her people. When we do, we all win.